

D&D Fiction
Oroon Rising, Part 7
by Ed Greenwood



Chapter 7: Several Surprises

Lockilgar leaped, and ran right up the Great Idol's rising stone arm. It rose and bent at the elbow, as broad as many a street he'd strolled. The halfling sprang across the sudden cleft from its forearm to its bicep—if living stone idols had biceps—and thence to a broad, massive shoulder.

He ran along it, leapt to an ear. When he felt the idol start to turn its head and lift its hand to sweep him away, Lockilgar swung from ear to stony cheek, his chisel-knife gleaming in his hand.

This was no nut-tree, but the blade went in readily enough, thrusting the great gem—Godsfire, 'twas big as his chest!—up and out, toppling toward him before the great reaching fingers were even near.

It was the work of but a moment to kick the gem completely loose, and then backswing to the ear and cling there, watching it tumble.

Down, down into the flickering flames below.

Where it landed with a crash, caught fire in a flaring of angry flame—and what sort of gem did that?—and in a blinking instant was gone.

The Great Idol trembled under Lockilgar the Fearless, and as he blinked again in dawning delight, a webwork of cracks appeared in the ear he was clinging to, the head it adorned, and the great body below.

The hand that had been reaching for him stopped and started to descend with urgent speed, heading for the flaming bowl. Beyond it, the Most Heroic of Halflings caught sight of Jallana calmly whirling two ringing swords in her hands, holding three axe-swinging lizardfolk at bay.

The last three. The rest lay butchered in her wake.

Tarlastra was standing behind her, gazing up at him with her hands raised, as if ready to hurl a spell—the moment she decided what magic was needed.

Lockilgar gave her a wave and a grin, and swung around the back of the sculpted head. Ducking low, he ran across the nape of the neck to reach the other ear. And the other eye-gem.

The cracks in the fire-amber stone beneath his boots were larger, and groaning a thousand small gratings as the Great Idol moved.

The idol raked in vain at the flames of its bowl, spilling a gout of them over the edge to strike a lizard warrior across the back and leave it convulsed and screaming.

As it fell, shuddering, Jallana made swift work of the other two—and slashed open the throat of the burning third out of sheer mercy.

By then Lockilgar was shouting a warning to her, as the second gem tumbled toward waiting flames.

Jallana hurled herself backwards even before she looked up, making the halfling shout with laughter at Tarlastra's desperate dive aside to keep from being trampled flat by the warrior-woman.

And then the flames rose, the bowl trembled, the Great Idol shook with deafening thunders, and—there was nothing under Lockilgar's boots but a tumbling stormcloud of whirling stone shards.

He was falling, the idol suddenly gone in a great crumbling collapse that began with a sigh and ended with a roar of drifting rubble and rising clouds of clinging dust. He was going to hit hard, he was going to...

Tingle all over and gently, oh-so-gently drift down the last swordlength or so to where Tarlastra stood smiling at him, her fingers still glowing with the spell she'd cast on him.

There was a broad spattering of glistening lizardfolk blood across the front of her gown, but she seemed not to notice, let alone care. Jallana joined them, breathing hard but grinning in a way that made her look like a young lass up to mischief.

It was a look Lockilgar knew well, and responded to. His face betrayed just enough of his thinking for the warrior-woman to cock her head and give him a "Think the Gods are with you on this?" look—and then point over the rubble with her drawn swords and say, "You did it, Little Hero! The idol's no more, and the way beyond lies clear!"

"Clear to what?" Tarlastra asked, a trifle suspiciously. "More idols?"

Jallana chuckled. "Wouldn't that be just like the Gods? Yet, look you, this clambering over rubble is vastly preferable to dying under those huge stone fists one more time."

The swirling dust was thick as fog as they fought their way through loose, shifting rubble that sucked their boots knee-deep in some places—but ended quite abruptly, leaving the three Proud Slayers staring at darkness.

"Tarla?" Jallana murmured, "how well can you see yon—"

Not wasting words on a reply, the dwarf conjured handfire and tossed a spinning globe of it ahead into the gloom.



Its glow fell fair upon a large chamber dominated by a long, massive, finely-sculpted table made of some white stone, now gray with thick dust. Chairs were drawn up along both sides of this long board, stretching off into the gloom, and... there seemed to be nothing else to be seen in this room but the far end of this feasting-table. Not a door nor a window broke the smooth sweep of the walls.

Cautiously the three approached the grand table, seeing that under the furry gray dust and cobwebs lay the remnants of a long-ago feast. Down the table were heaps of dust on golden plates and at the bottoms of a small crystal forest of wineglasses. Larger piles of dust were slumped in the chairs, and Lockilgar shivered as he saw a crown-adorned skull lolling amid one such heap, and realized what he was looking upon.

"I see no way on," Jallana murmured. "Tarla? Should we spend a spell seeking hidden ways and spyholes?"

"Later," the dwarf snapped, around her unlit pipe. "I dislike the looks of this table. If I turned my back on it, would skeletons rise up in every seat to clutch at me?"

Lockilgar shrugged. "We'll never know unless you turn your back on it, will we? In the meantime—" Voice quickening with eagerness, he drove his knife through a particular chairful of cobwebs and turned them aside, half-expecting a hand-sized spider to scurry, or bones to rise up in a whirlwind to menace him. None did, and a moment later he was holding up a rune-marked flask. "Unless this mark had some other meaning years back," he announced, "this holds a quaff of magical healing." His other hand stabbed down through dust and came up with a finger-ring set with stones as large as his thumbnails. The halfling grinned excitedly. "Now this is treasure." He hastened to the next chair, where what might once have been a skull yielded up a crown whose gold and thick-clustered gems made him whistle in amazement. Waving it at his fellow Slayers, he hurried to the next chair.

He was still one excited stride away from it when it was suddenly—occupied.

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